

Strategic Planning

**Is Improving the Way
We Do Business at the
Census Bureau**




BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

A Message from
Martha Farnsworth Riche
Director, Bureau of the Census

Our strategic planning efforts are only a year old, but are already improving the way we do business at the Census Bureau. This report illustrates some of the tangible benefits that have come from all our hard work.

Any organization that wants to survive, let alone excel, must satisfy and respect its customers, increase its productivity, and value its work force. Our strategic planning effort has let us improve in all these areas, strengthening the future for all of us. Let me tell you how.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Martha Farnsworth Riche". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Martha" being the most prominent part.

A New Mission Statement

Being the premier producer of timely, relevant, and high quality data requires world-class abilities.

Our new Mission Statement is not just a plaque on the wall: It's a practical guide for doing business every day. It explains what we do and don't do. It highlights areas where we must excel and those where we must seek partnerships. What is our new mission statement?

To be the preeminent collector and provider of timely, relevant, and quality data about the people and economy of the United States.

We will succeed by:

- Valuing our employees,
- Innovating in our work, and
- Responding to our customers.

This focus is important because it sets us apart from the rest of the rapidly growing information industry. Other organizations do a good job of producing quick results from overnight polls or surveys of their membership. But their results are based on small samples and provide a fragmented picture of society. Only the Census Bureau provides detailed and accurate data of national consequence. If it's big and important—we do it!

Being the premier producer of timely, relevant, and high quality data requires world-class abilities. We must maintain and improve our "core skills"—among them, excellence in organizing our field force, developing survey instruments, and enhancing our mathematical and statistical skills.

In keeping with our mission statement, we have said "yes" to sharpening our

skills in our major line of business: large-scale surveys of households and businesses. And we have said "yes" to disseminating more data to more people at less cost through electronic publishing.

Everything we do must further our mission, and if it doesn't, we don't do it. For example, in 1995, we said "no" to new lines of survey business that did not meet our standards for quality. And we said "no" to lengthy printed reports for limited groups of users.

We also acknowledged that we must enter into relationships with private organizations whenever they have skills we lack. For example: while we must retain responsibility for the decennial census, we realize that some functions such as promotions and technology services can be outsourced.

Saying "no" liberates us to be the kind of organization we want to be. We can say "yes" to the investments we need to make in our future, like information technology and exciting new surveys.

In today's highly competitive environment, this kind of decisionmaking will stand us in good stead. This year we were able to bring back business—such as the American Travel Survey—that others were competing for. Our mission statement doesn't just limit what we do—it guides us to new opportunities that will help propel the Census Bureau into the next century.

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Our Vision

In 1995, we said "no" to new lines of survey business that did not meet our standards for quality.

Achieving our Vision begins with identifying the key areas where we must succeed. Teams composed of individuals throughout the Census Bureau developed meaningful objectives for each of these areas. I'll describe them and tell you about some of our accomplishments:

Goal 1: Greater Customer Satisfaction

What our customers want must dictate what we do. Interviews with the Census Bureau's current, former, and potential customers revealed more dissatisfaction than we anticipated. Here are some actions we've taken in response to their concerns:

- We have centralized our customer service and delivery functions. At the Census Bureau, customer service is everybody's job. But centralizing our customer service function assures each customer that someone is looking out for them.
- We created a new office devoted to consumer analysis and product development. This office will keep us up-to-date on what our customers want and hold us accountable for designing products for real world application.
- The Census Bureau Internet site has been continuously enhanced and expanded and now receives nearly 70,000 inquiries a day. Making Census Bureau data

available on Internet gives customers what they want, not what we think they need.

Goal 2: Greater Productivity

Improved productivity results in lower costs, greater timeliness, and higher quality. Look at what we have achieved by adopting more efficient and innovative methods:

- We are outfitting our interviewers with computers that collect data faster and more accurately. This new technique proved invaluable after the November government shutdown shifted interviewing for the Current Population Survey to the short Thanksgiving week. Even so, the interviews were completed on time and the monthly unemployment numbers were released on schedule.
- We're moving from time-consuming and expensive printed products to greater reliance on faster, better, and cheaper electronic data dissemination. Internet users will get exactly the data they need using the Census Bureau's Data Access and Delivery System (DADS).
- We're developing an administrative and financial management system called CAMS (Commerce Administrative Management System). CAMS will improve our understanding of cost. It will

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enable us to give employees specific budget goals and hold them accountable for them. Once we do this, we can eliminate paper-pushing, control-oriented management, and get down to real work

Goal 3: Better Public Perception and Cooperation

By improving public perception, we will increase public cooperation with our censuses and surveys. Our respondents have a right to know the important reasons behind our data collection efforts. And we are obligated to minimize their work by asking only those questions we must, in a user-friendly, respectful manner. Here are some important steps we've taken toward this goal:

- New technology allows us to design forms that are easier for people to read and fill out. The simpler and easier the forms are, the more accurate and less expensive the census or surveys will be. We're working with private marketers to develop new, user-friendly forms for the decennial census. Throughout the mailing package, we're using graphic designs and themes that will change respondents' perceptions of the census.
- We are completing testing for the American Community Survey, the largest ongoing survey in the world, and the base of what we call

"continuous measurement." It will combine the Census Bureau's unique ability to collect data at the local level with the quality and timeliness of continuing surveys. The American Community Survey will provide an ongoing, up-to-date picture of the Nation. And it will reduce both duplication in survey inquiries and the burden we place on respondents.

- This year, we moved forward with research on administrative records. Increased use of administrative records is a promising way to maintain data quality while reducing the burden of federal government surveys.

Goal 4: Develop a More Diverse, Effective, and Skilled Work Force

Our most important asset is the people who walk in our door every day. We want to maximize the benefits of diversity, strengthen our relationship with employees, and develop highly productive teams. Here are some specific achievements:

- Working closely with employees with different sets of skills broadens everyone's understanding of our mission—and creates new career opportunities for them. Teams boost productivity by breaking down barriers innate in the old way of organizing work. In Jeffersonville, employees at all

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levels were empowered to work on teams and to play a role in decisions formerly reserved for management. The use of team-based ideas resulted in a significant decrease in the cost per case of the Current Population Survey. For this effort, the Data Preparation Division staff in Jeffersonville received the Secretary of Commerce's Award for Customer Service Excellence.

- We began a process called relationship-by-objectives with the Suitland union local. Through this process, we hope to develop mutual trust and confidence that will serve as the foundation for forming a labor and management partnership at Census Bureau headquarters.
- We recently opened the Census Bureau Career Resource Center. By providing a variety of training programs, self-assessment software, career counseling, and job search information, the Center helps employees make the most of their careers.

What's Next?

I want to thank the many Census Bureau employees who worked so hard to make strategic planning a success in 1995. During the next year, our focus will be on action plans. Be assured that next year, I will be announcing another banner year of achievement. Here are some of the specific actions we will complete in 1996:

- We will complete an initial assessment of customer needs. We'll add new products and services they want and eliminate those they don't. Our objective is to demonstrate 90-percent customer satisfaction by 1997.
- We will increase our reimbursable business by assigning responsibility for developing new business to individual program managers. Our objective here is to increase revenues from new business activities by 15 percent.
- We will establish a single point of contact for all customer inquiries. Our objective is to increase overall customer satisfaction with our products and services by 25 percent in 1996.
- We will develop computer-based systems to allow us to design and select samples more rapidly. Our objective is to reduce the time between project conception and data collection for our federal agency customers by 25 percent.

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- We will determine each operating division's computer needs. Within 3 years, we will have a single, interoperable computing environment throughout the Census Bureau. This will support our goal of increasing productivity. It will also make it easier for our employees to move across programs—an important source of career opportunities.
- We will determine whether and where administrative records systems can replace direct data collection. Our objective is to identify new opportunities and avoid direct inquiries of households and businesses.
- We will develop a new system of recognizing and rewarding employees. Our objective here is to demonstrate the value we place on their contributions.

Everything we accomplished this year and all we will do next year has one aim—to make us the preeminent collector and provider of timely, relevant, and quality data about Americans and their economy. Together, we're going to do it. Our future depends on it.

A Simpler, Cheaper, and More Accurate Census 2000

Last year, we made enormous progress toward designing a census for the new century that will be simpler, cheaper, and more accurate. We'll reach these goals by following four strategies: developing partnerships, keeping things simple, taking advantage of the latest technology, and incorporating widely accepted statistical methods.

- Through partnerships with the U.S. Postal Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and state, tribal, and local governments, we are updating the address list and geographic systems for Census 2000. Cooperation will reduce the number of households missed by the census. Partnerships with the private sector will also enable the Census Bureau to access world class technology for Census 2000.
- Simpler census forms that were developed in 1995 will be tested in 1996. This year, we will extend our form simplification work to include the longer sample form. Every form that is returned by mail improves the accuracy of the census and reduces the cost of sending out enumerators. By sending out replacement forms and placing additional forms in public places, we're making it easy for people to respond—even if their forms were misplaced.
- Modern image-processing technology, incorporated into our new forms design, will reduce error from manual data entry and cut down on the number of temporary workers we hire. The prototype used in the 1995 Census Test was successful. In 1996, further testing will be conducted and a Request for Proposals will be issued. An evaluation of automated matching technologies, begun in 1995, will be further explored in 1996. New tools developed by this effort will reduce the chance of double counting in Census 2000.
- Statistical methods were part of our tests in 1995 and further testing will be conducted in 1996. Sampling for nonresponse will save costly return visits to unresponsive households. And integrated coverage measurement will enable us to measure and eliminate the differential in the count among various population groups.

Should the Bureau Do Reimbursable Work?

The Bureau's mission statement says that we are the nation's premier producer of important economic and social data that require broad scope and detail and high levels of accuracy. If it's big and important, we do it.

But what if the organization that wants those data is outside the Department of Commerce? The answer is that we should compete for and perform work that fits with our mission statement and our standards, regardless of the source. Let me tell you why.

If we are going to be the best at what we do, then we're going to have to improve continually our core skills—sample design, field organization, instrument design and execution, data management, and the like. Doing that requires significant investments of time, money, and effort in research and development and training.

We need to spread the costs of those investments—programs such as CASIC, the modernization of our data management infrastructure, the use of automated sample selection—over as large a base as possible. If we can expand our base of work, then we can make these investments, keep innovating, and improve the quality of our product while reducing its costs for federal and nonfederal customers alike.

And the benefits of reimbursable work don't stop there. Reimbursable work helps to spread the costs of our administrative overheads. It helps provide a base for maintaining our staffs in our regional offices and in our data processing centers, and reduce some of the cyclical highs and lows created by the decennial census.

In the final analysis, there are no private firms that have the field structure and administrative data necessary to collect survey information at the scale we do. That's why there is a Census Bureau—to fill this important national need. If there's a job that fits that mission and that meets our standards for quality, scope, and detail, then it's our job to do it. Reimbursable work, therefore, helps make the Bureau better, reduces costs to the federal government, and allows us to provide an important social product. That's why it's our policy to accept it.

